

**METHOD OF AND APPARATUS FOR COMMODITY SELLING
INTERMEDIATION, AND COMPUTER PRODUCT**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to a technology which can improve the facilities for customers when a plurality of commodities are purchased on an on-line system and which can contribute to a reduction in purchase price.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

 In recent years, with the development of the internet, on-line shopping service in which commodities are purchased through the internet has been general. For this reason, in a company which develops on-line shopping, movement which
15 pursues the facilities of on-line shopping which will more spread in the future is activated.

 In a conventional on-line shopping system, a customer accesses an on-line shopping server through the internet to order a desired commodity from a commodity list. When
20 a shop receives this order, the shop assigns delivery of the commodity to a forwarding agent. In this manner, the commodity is delivered to the customer by the forwarding agent several days after. In addition, the purchase price of the commodity is paid on the basis of settlement
25 information input when the order is made.

In the conventional on-line shopping system, when a commodity is singularly purchased, a consumer compares the selling prices of the commodity in a plurality of on-line shops, and often purchases the commodity having the lowest price. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the purchase of a single commodity, since consumers can easily compare selling prices with each other in the on-line shopping system, it can be said that the on-line shopping system is a method which has high facilities for consumers and which can purchase commodities at low prices.

However, since a shop is always compared with other shops with respect to selling prices, the shop so excessively promotes sales in the shop that the shop takes a risk of limitless low-price competition.

In addition, a customer easily compares prices of a single commodity. However, in a conventional on-line shopping system, when a consumer purchases a plurality of commodities such as necessities at once, facilities may be poor, and the costs may be high. More specifically, when a plurality of commodities are purchased at once, operations for summing the prices of the plurality of commodities must be respectively performed in shops. Therefore, the operations are very cumbersome for the shops.

For this reason, many consumers always purchase commodities in fixed shops without comparing totals of prices

in the shops with each other. It is a fact that consumers let the chance to purchase a commodity at a low cost slip.

In the conventional on-line shopping system, since the shop side has the right to select forwarding agents in transportation of commodities, shops often assign transportation to fixed forwarding agents, respectively because of transaction conditions inherent to the shops. However, in recent years, each forwarding agent always reviews a transportation fee system and service contents to obtain customers. For this reason, there is a risk that a customer misses a golden opportunity to select a forwarding agent which can give a low transportation fee to the customer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of this invention to provide a method of and apparatus for commodity selling intermediation which can improve the facilities of a customer when the customer purchases a plurality of commodities on an on-line system and which can contribute to a reduction in purchase price. It is another object of this invention to provide a computer that contains instructions which when executed on a computer realizes the method according to the present invention on the computer.

According to one aspect of this invention, a customer inputs order information related to a plurality of

commodities; the commodity selling prices of a plurality of shops is referred to and totals of the prices of the plurality of ordered commodities in the shops is compared with each other and the total is displayed to the customer.

- 5 The customer selects one of the shops as a selling agent. An order is placed to the shop selected by the customer through a network on the basis of order contents of the commodities.

- According to another aspect of this invention order information related to the plurality of commodities designated by the customer is transmitted to a server connected through a network. Commodity selling prices which are transmitted from the server in accordance with the transmitted order information are received and which have a state in which at least some of the plurality of commodities are concealed and the totals of the prices of the plurality of commodities. The received commodity selling prices which have the state in which at least some of the plurality of commodities are concealed and the totals of the prices are displayed.
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- 20 Other objects and features of this invention will become apparent from the following description with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- 25 Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the configuration

of an embodiment according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing an example of a commodity information database 600 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing an example of a commodity
5 category information database 610 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing an example of a maker information database 620 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 5 is a diagram showing an example of a shop information database 630 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 6 is a diagram showing an example of a
10 person-in-charge-of-shop information database 640 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 7 is a diagram showing an example of a shop commodity information database 650 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 8 is a diagram showing an example of a shop
15 transportation information database 660 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 9 is a diagram showing an example of an order slip header information database 670 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 10 is a diagram showing an example of an order
20 slip body information database 680 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 11 is a diagram showing an example of a transportation information database 690 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 12 is a diagram showing an example of a customer information database 700 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 13 is a diagram showing an example of a forwarding
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agent information database 710 shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 14 is a flow chart for explaining an operation of the embodiment;

Fig. 15 is a diagram showing an example of a commodity list screen 800 in the embodiment;

Fig. 16 is a diagram showing an example of a commodity list screen 810 in the embodiment;

Fig. 17 is a diagram showing an example of a ship selling price list screen 820 in the embodiment;

Fig. 18 is a diagram showing an example of a customer information input screen 830 in the embodiment;

Fig. 19 is a diagram showing an example of a content confirmation screen 840 in the embodiment;

Fig. 20 is a diagram showing an example of a content confirmation screen 850 in the embodiment;

Fig. 21 is a diagram showing an example of a forwarding agent list screen 860 in the embodiment;

Fig. 22 is a diagram showing an example of a final confirmation screen 870 in the embodiment;

Fig. 23 is a diagram showing an example of a settlement information input screen 880 in the embodiment;

Fig. 24 is a diagram showing an example of an order confirmation mail 890 in the embodiment;

Fig. 25 is a diagram showing an example of a delivery delay mail 895 in the embodiment; and

Fig. 26 is a diagram showing the configuration of a modification of the embodiment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

5 Embodiment of a method of and apparatus for commodity selling intermediation, and computer product according to the present invention will be described below with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the configuration
10 of an embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 1 shows a commodity selling intermediation system in which customer clients 100_1 to 100_n , shop clients 300_1 to 300_m , forwarding agent clients 400_1 to 400_s , and a commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 are connected to the internet
15 200. In Fig. 1, for the sake of convenience in description, communication devices (terminal adapters, routers, fire walls, and the like) required for internet connection are omitted.

The customer clients 100_1 to 100_n are n computers
20 installed on customer sides of shops in which commodities are sold in an on-line system, and access the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 (to be described later) through the internet 200 according to the TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol). Each
25 of the customer clients 100_1 to 100_n is constituted by a

computer body, a display, a keyboard, a mouse, and the like.

The customer clients 100_1 to 100_n are used to select the commodities, to input settlement information, and the like. In addition, the customer clients 100_1 to 100_n comprise
5 mailers (not shown) and browsers, respectively. The mailer provides a function for transmitting/receiving electronic mails through a mail server (not shown).

In transmission/reception of electronic mails, SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) and POP3 (Post Office
10 Protocol version 3) are used. The browsers are computer programs for browsing various screens (see Figs. 15 to 23) provided by the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500.

The shop clients 300_1 to 300_m are m computers installed
15 in shops in which commodities are sold in an on-line system, and access the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 through the internet 200 according to the TCP/IP. Each of the shop clients 300_1 to 300_m is constituted by a computer body, a display, a keyboard, a mouse, and the like. The
20 shop clients 300_1 to 300_m are used for registration of commodity information to the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500, reception of an order information, and the like. In this case, in the shop, not only on-line sales of commodities, but also face-to-face
25 sales are performed.

The forwarding agent clients 400₁ to 400_s are s
computers installed in forwarding agents, respectively, and
access the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500
(to be described later) through the internet 200 according
5 to the TCP/IP. Each of the forwarding agent clients 400₁
to 400_s is constituted by a computer body, a display, a
keyboard, a mouse, and the like.

The forwarding agent clients 400₁ to 400_s are used for
registration of forwarding agent information, assignment
10 of transportation, and the like. The forwarding agent is
a company for transporting a commodity of a shop which
receives an on-line order of a commodity from a customer
to the customer. When a shop has a unique transportation
system, and the process of transporting a commodity may be
15 executed on the shop side without assigning transportation
to a forwarding agent.

The commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500
comprises a function of showing a plurality of commodities
dealt by m shops corresponding to the shop clients 300₁ to
20 300_m to a customer through the internet 200 and showing the
totals of the prices of commodities desired to be purchased.
In general, the selling prices of the commodities in shops
are different from each other depending on buying routes
or selling strategies. In this case, the totals of the prices
25 of commodities which are desired to be purchased are

different from each other depending on the shops.

The commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 has a function of causing a customer to select a shop serving as a selling agent from a plurality of shops and executing
5 an ordering process to the selected shop through the internet 200. In addition, the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 has a function for executing a process of requesting a forwarding agent through the internet 200 to transport a commodity from the shop to a client.

10 In the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500, a communication control unit 510 controls communication between the customer clients 100_1 to 100_n , the shop clients 300_1 to 300_m , and the forwarding agent clients 400_1 to 400_s through the internet 200 according to the TCP/IP. A control
15 unit 520 performs various control operations for realizing a commodity selling intermediation function.

More specifically, the control unit 520 is constituted by a main control unit 530, a mail control unit 540, a registration control unit 550, and a screen generation unit
20 560. The main control unit 530 executes control related to commodity selling intermediation. The detailed operation of the main control unit 530 will be described later. The mail control unit 540 controls transmission/reception of electronic mails. The
25 registration control unit 550 executes control related to

information registration into various databases (to be described later). The screen generation unit 560 generates various screens (to be described later) (see transportation Figs. 15 to 23). A bus 570 connects the respective units

5 of the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500.

A commodity information database 600 is a database in which commodity information related to all commodities sold through an on-line system by m shops corresponding to the shop clients 300₁ to 300_m. More specifically, the

10 commodity information database 600, as shown in Fig. 2, comprises fields of "JAN (Japan Article Number) code", "trade name", "maker code", "manufacture's recommended retail price", "commodity image", "commodity category code", "commodity size", "commodity weight", "combination flag",

15 and "quantity".

The "JAN code" is a code for uniquely discriminating commodities of respective makers, and is information related to a 13-digit number corresponding to a bar code added to each commodity. The "trade name" is information related

20 to the name of a commodity. The "maker code" is information related to codes for discriminating makers which manufacture commodities from each other. The "manufacture's recommended retail price" is information related to sticker prices (fixed prices) desired by makers of the commodities.

25 The "commodity image" is information related to image files

of the commodities.

The "commodity category code" is information related to the categories of the commodities. The "commodity size" is information related to the sizes (length + width + height) of the commodities. The "commodity weight" is information related to the weights of the commodities. The "combination flag" is a flag representing whether the commodities are constituted by a combination of a plurality of commodities or not. The "quantity" is information related to the number of commodities when a plurality of commodities are sold at once.

Returning to Fig. 1, a commodity category information database 610 is a database in which pieces of commodity category information representing the categories of the commodities are stored. More specifically, the commodity category information database 610, as shown in Fig. 3, comprises fields or the like of "commodity category code" (see Fig. 2) for discriminating the categories of the commodities from each other, "commodity category" related to the categories, and "reference". The "commodity category code" corresponds to the "commodity category code" of the commodity information database 600.

Returning to Fig. 1, a maker information database 620 is a database in which maker information related to the makers of the commodities is stored. More specifically, the maker

information database 620, as shown in Fig. 4, comprises fields or the like of "maker code" (see Fig. 2), "maker name" related to the names of the makers, and "address" related to the addresses of the makers. The "maker code" corresponds to the "maker code" of the commodity information database 600.

Returning to Fig. 1, a shop information database 630 is a database in which pieces of shop information of shops corresponding to the shop clients 300_i to 300_m are stored. More specifically, the shop information database 630, as shown in Fig. 5, "shop code" for discriminating shops from each other, "shop name" related to the names of the shops, "shop municipal code" corresponding to the addresses of the shops, "address" related to the addresses of the shops, and "telephone number" related to the telephone numbers of the shops.

Returning to Fig. 1, a person-in-charge-of-shop information database 640 is a database in which person-in-charge-of-shop information related to persons in charge of on-line sales in the shops is stored. More specifically, the person-in-charge-of-shop information database 640, as shown in Fig. 6, comprises fields or the like of "shop code" for discriminating shops from each other, "person-in-charge ID" for discriminating persons in charge of on-line sales in the shops from each other,

"section-in-charge name" related to the names of sections in charge of on-line sales, "person-in-charge name" related to the names of persons in charge, "telephone number" related to the telephone numbers of sections in charge, and "E-mail" related to the electronic mail addresses of the persons in charge. The "shop code" corresponds to the "shop code" of the shop information database 630.

Returning to Fig. 1, a shop commodity information database 650 is a database in which shop pieces of commodity information related to pieces of commodity information in shops are stored. More specifically, as shown in Fig. 7, the shop commodity information database 650 comprises fields or the like of "shop code" for discriminating shops from each other and "JAN code" (see Fig. 2) which is information related to 13-digit numbers corresponding bar codes added to commodities. The "shop code" corresponds to the "shop code" of the shop information database 630. The "JAN code" corresponds to the "JAN code" of the commodity information database 600.

In addition, the shop commodity information database 650 comprises fields or the like of "selling price" related to the selling prices (actual selling prices) of the commodities in the shops, "update date" related to dates on which pieces of commodity information are updated, "the number of stocks" related to the number of commodities in

store in the shops, and "order flag" (1: order is necessary, 0: order is unnecessary) representing whether an order of the commodities to a maker is required or not.

When the number of stocks is equal to or smaller than
5 a preset threshold value, the order is required, and the "order flag" is set to be 1. For example, it is assumed that order point information serving as a reference point at which an order is placed is managed as data corresponding to the threshold value. In this case, the number of stocks
10 and the order point are compared with each other, so that it can be determined whether the order is required or not.

Returning to Fig. 1, a transportation consignment information database 660 is a database in which shop transportation information related to transportation
15 structures (transportation structures obtained by unique transportation systems or transportation structures obtained by assignment to forwarding agents) of commodities in shops is stored. More specifically, the shop transformation information database 660, as shown in Fig.
20 8, fields or the like of "shop code" for discriminating shops from each other, "municipal code" representing areas in which the shops can deliver commodities, "transportation fee" related to transportation fees when the unique transportation system is used, and "transportation
25 possible/impossible flag" (1: possible, 0: impossible)

representing whether transportation of commodities can be performed by the unique transportation system or not. The "shop code" corresponds to "shop code" of the shop information database 630.

- 5 Returning to Fig. 1, an order slip header information database 670 is a database in which order slip header information related to header information of order slips formed when commodities are ordered by a customer is stored. More specifically, the order slip header information
- 10 database 670, as shown in Fig. 9, comprises fields or the like of "order number" added to each order, "input date" related to dates on which pieces of order information are input, "customer ID" for discriminating customers (orderers) from each other, and "shop code" for
- 15 discriminating shops from each other.

In addition, the order slip header information database 670 comprises fields of "customer municipal code" corresponding to the addresses of customers, "scheduled time and data for collection" related to scheduled time and date

20 for collection of commodities by a forwarding agent, "scheduled time and date for delivery" related to desired time and date for delivery of commodities, "total of prices of commodities" related to totals of the prices of the ordered commodities, "total size of commodities" related to a total

25 size of the ordered commodities, "total weight of

commodities" related to a total weight of the ordered commodities, "forwarding agent code" for discriminating forwarding agents in charge of transportation of the commodities from each other, "transportation fee" related to transportation fees paid for transportation of the commodities, and "reference". The "shop code" corresponds to the "shop code" of the shop information database 630.

Returning to Fig. 1, an order slip body information database 680 is a database in which order slip body information related to body information of the order slips is stored. More specifically, the order slip body information database 680, as shown in Fig. 10, "order number" added to each order, the above "JAN code", "selling price" related to selling prices of ordered commodities, "commodity size" related to the sizes of the commodities, "commodity weight" related to the weights of the commodities. The "JAN code" corresponds to the "JAN code" of the commodity information database 600 and the "JAN code" of the shop commodity information database 650.

Returning to Fig. 1, a transportation information database 690 is a database in which transportation information related to transportation of ordered commodities is stored. More specifically, the transportation information database 690, as shown in Fig. 11, comprises fields of "order number" added to each order,

"shop municipal code" related to the addresses of shops with which orders are placed, and "forwarding agent code" for discriminating forwarding agents in charge of transportation of commodities from each other. The "order number" corresponds to the "order number" of the order slip header information database 670 and the "order number" of the order slip body information database 680.

In addition, the transportation information database 690 comprises fields of "service code" for discriminating service forms of transportation from each other, "transportation fee" related to the transportation fees of the commodities, "scheduled time and data for collection" related to scheduled time and date on which the forwarding agents collect the commodities from the shops, "scheduled time and date for delivery" related to scheduled time and date for delivering the commodities to customers, and "reference". The "scheduled time and date for collection" corresponding to the "scheduled time and date for collection" of the order slip header information database 670.

Returning to Fig. 1, a customer information database 700 is a database in which pieces of customer information related to customers corresponding to the customer clients 100₁ to 100_n. More specifically, as shown in Fig. 12, the customer information database 700 comprises fields or the like of "customer ID" for discriminating customers from each

shops from each other, "password" used at the access time to the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500, "name" related to the names of the customers, "address" related to the addresses of the customers, "telephone number" related to the telephone numbers of the customers, "customer municipal code" related to the addresses of the customers, and "E-mail" related to the electronic mail addresses of the customers.

Returning to Fig. 1, a forwarding agent information database 710 is a database in which forwarding agent information related to forwarding agents in charge of transportation of commodities from shops to customers is stored. More specifically, the forwarding agent information database 710, as shown in Fig. 13, comprises fields of "forwarding agent code" for discriminating the forwarding agents from each other, "forwarding agent name" related to the names of the forwarding agents, and "address" related to the addresses of the forwarding agents.

The forwarding agent information database 710 comprises fields of "telephone number" related to the telephone numbers of the forwarding agents, "shop municipal code" corresponding to the addresses of the shops, "customer municipal code" corresponding to the addresses of the customers, "size" related to the sizes of the commodities (packages), "weight" related to the weights of the

commodities (packages), and "transportation fee" related to transportation fees paid when the commodities ("size" and "weight") are transported from an address corresponding to the "shop municipal code" to an address corresponding to the "customer municipal code".

In the forwarding agent information database 710, for each forwarding agent, data the number of which is equal to the number of combinations of the "shop municipal code", the "customer municipal code", the "size", and the "weight" exist. In the embodiment, when a forwarding agent provides a plurality of transportation services using different types of trucks or motorcycles (motorcycle service) and the like having different carrying capacities, transportation service codes for discriminating the transportation services from each other may be given to the forwarding agent information database 710 to set different transportation fees for different transportation services.

The pieces of information of the commodity information database 600, the commodity category information database 610, the transportation fee information database 620, the shop information database 630, the person-in-charge-of-shop information database 640, the shop commodity information database 650, the shop transformation information database 660, and the forwarding agent information database 710 are registered in advance

prior to a reception process performed by a customer. The pieces of information of the order slip header information database 670 and the order slip body information database 680 are registered each time an order is placed by a customer.

- 5 In addition, the information of the transportation information database 690 is registered each time an order including delivery using a forwarding agent is received from a customer.

- 10 An operation of the embodiment described above will be described below with reference to the flow chart shown in Fig. 14 and Figs. 15 to 24. In step SA1 shown in Fig. 14, the main control unit 530 of the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 decides whether an order request (access) is transmitted from one customer client of the customer clients 100₁ to 100_n or not through the internet 200. When the order request is not transmitted, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision.
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- 20 For example, when the order request is transmitted from the customer client 100₁, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA1 as "Yes". In step SA2, the main control unit 530 displays the commodity list screen 800 shown in Fig. 15 on a display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁ with reference to the commodity information database 600 (see Fig. 2).
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On the commodity list screen 800, a list of commodities sold by an on-line system in shops is displayed. More specifically, in the commodity list screen 800, trade names, JAN codes, manufacture's recommended retail prices (fixed prices), check boxes for order, select boxes for the number of ordered commodities, and a commodity selection button 801 are displayed. In step SA3, when the main control unit 530 decides whether the commodity selection button 801 is depressed or not, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the commodity selection button 801 is depressed.

A customer operates the customer client 100_i to check a check box for order corresponding to a commodity to be ordered from the commodity list displayed on the commodity list screen 800. After the quantity is selected, the commodity selection button 801 is depressed. In this manner, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA3 as "Yes".

In the embodiment, as a screen for causing a customer to select a commodity, in place of the commodity list screen 800 shown in Fig. 15, a commodity list screen 810 shown in Fig. 16 may be used. The commodity list screen 810 is a screen for causing a customer to select a commodity like a leaflet, and the images 811 to 813 of the commodities and manufacture's recommended retail prices corresponding to

the commodities are displayed with an arrangement which is like the arrangement in the space of the leaflet.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA4, the main control unit 530 searches the commodity information database 600 (see Fig. 2) and the shop commodity information database 650 (see Fig. 7) for manufacture's recommended retail price information and selling prices in the shops dealing the commodity by using the JAN code corresponding to a commodity selected on the commodity list screen 800 (see Fig. 15) as a key. On the basis of the searching result, a ship selling price list screen 820 shown in Fig. 17 is displayed on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁.

On the ship selling price list screen 820, the manufacture's recommended retail prices of the commodities ordered by a customer, selling prices in the respective shops (in Fig. 14, P supermarket, S store, and Q drug chain store), totals of prices in the shops, shop selection buttons 821 to 823 corresponding to the shops are displayed.

Some of the selling prices in each of the shops are intentionally concealed. This is because advantageous commodities (commodities discount percentages of which are high) for the shops and disadvantageous commodities (commodities discount percentages of which are low) for the shops vary due to different buying routes and different selling strategies. More specifically, this has an object

to show a customer company's effort that a discount percentage is decreased as a total of prices without showing a customer the above variations. Therefore, the customer can select a shop with which the customer must place an order while considers the comparison result of the totals of the prices of commodities in the shops and the favors of the shops.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA5, the main control unit 530 decides whether one shop selection button of the shop selection buttons 821 to 823 shown in Fig. 17 is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the shop selection button is depressed.

It is assumed that "S store" (a total of prices: 2480 yen) having the smallest total of prices is selected as the receiver of an order from P supermarket, S store, and Q drug chain store on the ship selling price list screen 820. In this case, the customer depresses the shop selection button 822 corresponding to the S store. In this manner, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA5 shown in Fig. 14 as "Yes".

In step SA6, the main control unit 530 displays a customer information input screen 830 shown in Fig. 18 on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100. On the customer information input screen 830, order commodity

information 831 related to commodities ordered by a customer, a customer information input column 832 used for input customer information such as the name of a customer, an address, a telephone number, an electronic mail address, 5 desired time and date for delivery of a commodity, and a total-of-prices display button 833 for displaying a total of prices including a transportation fee.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA7, the main control unit 530 decides whether the total-of-prices display button 10 833 is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the total-of-prices display button 833 is depressed. After customer information is input to the customer information input column 832 by a customer, when the total-of-prices 15 display button 833 is depressed, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA7 as "Yes".

In the embodiment, prior to the display of the customer information input screen 830, a log-in process for inputting customer ID/password of a customer is executed. After 20 customer information is acquired from the customer information database 700 (see Fig. 12) by using the customer ID/password as a key, the customer information may be displayed on the customer information input screen 830.

In step SA8, the main control unit 530 displays a 25 content confirmation screen for causing a customer to confirm

order contents and input customer information on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁. More specifically, when a transportation possible/impossible flag of the shop transformation information database 660 (see Fig. 8) is "1" (transportation can be performed by a unique transportation system) with respect to a shop serving as the receiver of an order, the main control unit 530 displays the content confirmation screen 840 shown in Fig. 19 on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁. On the content confirmation screen 840, order commodity information 841, customer information 842, and a content confirmation button 843 are displayed.

On the other hand, when the transportation possible/impossible flag of the shop transformation information database 660 (see Fig. 8) is "0" (transportation cannot be performed by a unique transportation system, i.e., a transportation structure obtained by a forwarding agent) with respect to a shop serving as the receiver of an order, the main control unit 530 displays a content confirmation screen 850 shown in Fig. 20 on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁. On the content confirmation screen 850, order commodity information 851, customer information 852, and a content confirmation button 853 are displayed.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA9, the main control

unit 530 decides whether the content confirmation button 843 or 853 (Fig. 19 or Fig. 20) is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the content confirmation button 843 or 853 is depressed. The content confirmation screen 850 (see Fig. 20) is displayed on the display unit of the customer client 100₁. When the content confirmation button 853 is depressed by the customer, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA9 as "Yes".

In step SA10, the main control unit 530 displays a forwarding agent list screen 860 shown in Fig. 21 on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁. More specifically, the main control unit 530 searches the forwarding agent information database 710 by using a shop municipal code (see Fig. 5) of a shop serving as a receiver of an order and a customer municipal code (see Fig. 12) corresponding to a customer as keys. The main control unit 530 displays a forwarding agent list screen 860 (see Fig. 21) constituted by order commodity information 861, customer information 862, forwarding agent information 863 based on a searching result, and assignment buttons 864 to 866 on the display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁.

The forwarding agent information 863 is constituted by a place to make contact, a transportation route, a transportation fee, and a total of the prices of ordered

commodities including a delivery fee for each of forwarding agents (in Fig. 21, forwarding agent A, forwarding agent B, and forwarding agent C) to which transportation of a commodity is assigned. The assignment buttons 864 to 866 are arranged in accordance with the forwarding agents, and are button for selecting forwarding agents to which transportation of commodities is assigned from a plurality of forwarding agents in consideration of transportation fees or the like. When the content confirmation button 843 shown in Fig. 19 is depressed, i.e., when a transportation system unique to a selling shop is used, an external forwarding agent need not be selected, and step SA10 and step SA11 are skipped.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA11, the main control unit 530 decides whether one assignment button of the assignment buttons 864 to 866 (see Fig. 21) is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the assignment button is depressed. For example, when forwarding agent B is selected by a customer, and when the assignment button 865 is depressed, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA11 as "Yes".

In step SA12, the main control unit 530 displays a final confirmation screen 870 shown in Fig. 22 on the display unit of the customer client 100₁. On the final confirmation

screen 870, order commodity information, customer information, forwarding agent information, amount-of-paid information, and a final confirmation button 871 are displayed. The final confirmation screen 870 is a screen
5 for causing a customer to finally confirm an order. In the embodiment, the association or the like of a forwarding agent may be displayed on the final confirmation screen 870.

Returning Fig. 14, in step SA13, the main control unit 530 decides whether the final confirmation button 871 (see
10 Fig. 22) is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the final confirmation button 871 is depressed. After the customer confirms that order contents, customer information, and the like are right by the final confirmation
15 screen 870, the customer depresses the final confirmation button 871. In this manner, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA13 as "Yes". The main control unit 530 registers the transportation information in the transportation information database 690 (see Fig. 11).

20 In step SA14, the main control unit 530 displays a settlement information input screen 880 shown in Fig. 23 on the display unit of the customer client 100₁. The settlement information input screen 880 is a screen for causing a customer to input commodity settlement information
25 (for example, credit card information of the customer). On

the settlement information input screen 880, order commodity information 881, customer information 882, forwarding agent information 883, a settlement information input column 884, and a pay button 885 are displayed.

- 5 The settlement information input column 884 is a column for inputting the number of a credit card used by the customer to pay the price related to the order, the name of the credit card, and the term of validity.

- 10 Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA15, the main control unit 530 decides whether the pay button 885 (see Fig. 23) is depressed or not. The main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision until the pay button 885 is depressed. When the pay button 885 is depressed after the settlement information is input to the settlement information input column 884, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result in step SA15 as "Yes".

- 20 In step SA16, the main control unit 530 stores the pieces of information in the order slip header information database 670 (see Fig. 9) and the order slip body information database 680 (see Fig. 10) on the basis of the settlement information input screen 880 (see Fig. 23). The main control unit 530 executes an ordering process of encoding and transmitting these pieces of information to, e.g., the shop client 300₁ through the internet 200 as order information.
- 25 The main control unit 530 also encodes and transmits

the customer information 882 and the forwarding agent information 883 shown in Fig. 23 to the shop client 300₁ through the internet 200. In this manner, in a shop (S store) corresponding to the shop client 300₁, an order slip, a transportation slip, and the like are formed on the basis of the received information, and classification of ordered commodities and a packaging operation are performed.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA17, the mail control unit 540 (see Fig. 1) forms the order confirmation mail 890 shown in Fig. 24 and transmits the order confirmation mail 890 to a customer (orderer) through the internet 200. The order confirmation mail 890 is an electronic mail for notifying the customer of order contents, a total of prices, a delivery fee, settlement information, a scheduled date for delivery of the order, and the like to confirm the order.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA18, the main control unit 530 acquires transportation information related to the order from the transportation information database 690 (see Fig. 11), transmits the transportation information to, e.g., the forwarding agent client 400₁ through the internet 200, and executes a correction request process of requesting collection of commodities of a shop. In this manner, in a forwarding agent corresponding to the forwarding agent client 400₁, the commodities are collected at the scheduled time and date for collection in the shop, and a transportation

process is executed.

Returning to Fig. 14, in step SA19, the main control unit 530 decides whether today is the scheduled date for delivery with reference to the scheduled date for delivery shown in Fig. 11. When it does not reach the scheduled date, the main control unit 530 decides the decision result as "No" to repeat the decision. When it is the scheduled date for delivery of the commodity, in step SA20, the main control unit 530 inquires the delivery state (the presence/absence of delay or the like) of the commodity from the forwarding agent client 400₁ through an electronic mail or the like before the scheduled time for delivery.

When the delivery state is on schedule, the forwarding agent client 400₁ notifies the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 that the delivery state is on schedule through an electronic mail or the like. On the other hand, when it is behind the scheduled time for delivery, the forwarding agent client 400₁ notifies the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 of a reason for delay and the latest scheduled time for delivery through an electronic mail.

In step SA21, on the basis of the electronic mail from the forwarding agent client 400₁, the main control unit 530 decides whether delivery of a commodity to be delivered today is delayed or not. When the decision result is "No", the

process in step SA23 is executed.

On the other hand, when the decision result in step SA21 is "Yes", in step SA22, the mail control unit 540 forms a delivery delay mail 895 shown in Fig. 25 in which a letter of apology, a reason for delay of delivery, and the latest scheduled time and date for delivery are described, and transmits the delivery delay mail 895 to the customer client 100₁ through the internet 200. When the delivery delay mail 895 is received by the customer client 100₁, the customer recognizes that the delivery is delayed and the updated time and date for delivery. When the commodity is delivered to the customer, the forwarding agent client 400₁ notifies the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 that the commodity is delivered to the customer through an electronic mail.

In step SA23, after the main control unit 530 recognizes the arrival of the commodity by the electronic mail, a request process for requesting a cost (total of the prices of commodities + transportation fee) related to the order of commodities from a credit company on the basis of the settlement information (credit card information) input by the customer is executed. In step SA24, the main control unit 530 executes a payment process of paying the transportation fee to the forwarding agent.

As described above, according to the embodiment, with

reference to commodity selling prices (see the shop commodity information database 650) of a plurality of shops which sell commodities through the internet 200, totals of the prices of a plurality of commodities ordered by a customer are compared with each other between the shops and shown to the customer (see Fig. 17), and one shop is selected as a selling agent by the customer to place an order with the shop (see Fig. 17). For this reason, the totals of prices can be easily compared with each other between the plurality of shops, and the present invention can improve the facilities for the customer and can contribute to reductions of the purchase prices of the commodities.

Moreover, as shown in Fig. 17, since totals of prices are shown to a customer such that at least some of commodity selling prices of a plurality of commodities are concealed, an opportunity to reveal low prices as totals of prices can be given to shops independently of the differences between the commodity prices of the shops caused by the difference between commodity buying routes or selling strategies, and excessive low-price competition between the shops can be prevented.

Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 21, transportation fees of a plurality of forwarding agents related to transportation of a plurality of ordered commodities are compared with each other and shown to a customer, and one forwarding agent is

selected as a transportation assignee by the customer. Transportation business is assigned to the selected forwarding agent through the internet 200. For this reason, the customer can receive the merits of transformation fees.

5 Moreover, the delivery state of the commodity is inquired from the forwarding agent through the internet 200 before the scheduled time and date for delivery of the commodity included in the order information. When the delivery schedule is changed, the customer is notified that
10 the delivery schedule is changed through the internet 200. For this reason, a notice is made only when attention such as delayed delivery must be given to the customer, and the quality of customer service can be improved.

 Furthermore, commodity selling price information
15 which is transmitted from the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 in accordance with order information transmitted to the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 and which has a state in which at least some of the plurality of commodities are concealed
20 and the totals of the prices of the plurality of commodities are received by the customer client 100₁. As shown in Fig. 15, the received commodity selling prices which have the state in which some of the plurality of commodities are concealed and the totals of the prices are displayed on the
25 display unit (not shown) of the customer client 100₁. For

this reason, an opportunity to reveal low prices as totals of prices can given to shops independently of the differences between the commodity prices of the shops caused by the difference between commodity buying routes or selling strategies, and excessive low-price competition between the shops can be prevented.

Although the embodiment according to the present invention has been described above with reference to the accompanying drawings, a concrete example is not limited to this embodiment, and changes in design or the like which are made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention is included in the present invention.

For example, a commodity selling intermediation program for realizing the function of the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 described above may be recorded on a computer readable recording medium 1000 shown in Fig. 26, and the commodity selling intermediation program recorded on the recording medium 1000 may be loaded on a computer 900 shown in Fig. 26 and executed, so that the function of the commodity selling intermediation apparatus 500 may be realized.

The computer 900 shown in Fig. 26 is constituted by a CPU 910 for executing the commodity selling intermediation program, an input device 920 such as a keyboard or a mouse, a ROM (Read Only Memory) 930 for storing various data, a

RAM (Random Access Memory) 940 for storing operation parameters or the like, a reading device 950 for reading the commodity selling intermediation program from the recording medium 1000, an output device 960 such as a display or a printer, and a bus BU for connecting these components to each other.

The CPU 910 loads the commodity selling intermediation program recorded on the recording medium 1000 through the reading device 950 and executes the commodity selling intermediation program to execute a series of processes related to the intermediation of commodity sales. The recording medium 1000 includes a portable recording medium such as an optical disk, a floppy disk, or a hard disk as a matter of course, and also includes a transmission medium such as a network for temporarily recording and holding data.

As has been described above, according to the present invention, with reference to commodity selling prices of a plurality of shops which sell commodities, totals of the prices of a plurality of commodities ordered by a customer are compared with each other between the shops and shown to the customer, and one shop is selected as a selling agent by the customer to place an order placed with the shop. For this reason, the totals of prices can be easily compared with each other between the plurality of shops, and the present invention can advantageously improve the facilities

for the customer and contribute to reductions of the purchase prices of the commodities.

Moreover, since commodity selling prices of a plurality of commodities are shown to a customer such that
5 at least some of the commodity selling prices are concealed, an opportunity to reveal low prices as totals of prices can advantageously given to shops independently of the differences between the commodity prices of the shops caused by the difference between commodity buying routes or selling
10 strategies, and excessive low-price competition between the shops can be advantageously prevented.

Furthermore, transportation fees of a plurality of forwarding agents related to transportation of a plurality of ordered commodities are compared with each other and shown
15 to a customer, and one forwarding agent is selected as a transportation assignee by the customer. Transportation business is assigned to the selected forwarding agent through the network. For this reason, the customer can advantageously receive the merits of transformation fees.

Moreover, the delivery state of a commodity is inquired
20 from a forwarding agent through a network before scheduled time and date for delivery of the commodity included in order information. When the delivery schedule is changed, the customer is notified that the delivery schedule is changed.
25 For this reason, a notice is made only when attention such

as delayed delivery must be given to the customer, and the quality of customer service can be advantageously improved.

Furthermore, commodity selling prices which are transmitted from a server in accordance with order information transmitted to the server and which have a state in which at least some of the plurality of commodities are concealed and the totals of the prices of the plurality of commodities are received, and the received commodity selling prices which have the state in which some of the plurality of commodities are concealed and the totals of the prices are displayed. For this reason, an opportunity to reveal low prices as totals of prices can be given to shops independently of the differences between the commodity prices of the shops caused by the difference between commodity buying routes or selling strategies, and excessive low-price competition between the shops can be advantageously prevented.

Although the invention has been described with respect to a specific embodiment for a complete and clear disclosure, the appended claims are not to be thus limited but are to be construed as embodying all modifications and alternative constructions that may occur to one skilled in the art which fairly fall within the basic teaching herein set forth.